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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 30th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Piriz-Ballon (Uruguay), Mr. Guerrero (Philippines), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 80: PROTECTION OF GLOBAL CLIMATE FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS OF MANKIND (continued) (A/47/82-S/23512, A/47/120, A/47/225-S/23998, A/47/312-S/24238, A/47/351-S/24357, A/47/391, A/47/449, A/47/466, A/47/564)

AGENDA ITEM 78: DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (Part III) (continued) (A/47/393, A/47/388)

Conclusion of the general debate

1. Mr. BA (Mali) said that degradation of the soil in arid and semi-arid countries, especially in Africa, was one of the most disastrous effects of drought and desertification. The statistical data contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/47/393) reflected the scope of the phenomenon. More than 6.1 billion hectares or nearly 40 per cent of the Earth's land area was dryland, and of the 5.2 billion hectares of potentially productive drylands, 84 per cent were prone to desertification and 70 per cent were currently threatened by various forms of land degradation. During the famines which Africa had suffered, particularly in 1991, the populations of the affected areas had owed their survival entirely to international emergency assistance.

2. In the face of the problem, the General Assembly had, as far back as in December 1977, adopted the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (resolution 32/172). Resolutions 44/228 of December 1989 on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and 46/161 had been other important milestones. UNCED had established a new basis for international cooperation in that field by adopting chapter 12 of Agenda 21 entitled "Managing fragile ecosystems: combating desertification and drought", which embodied the concerns of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification.

3. His delegation attached the greatest importance to the implementation of the provisions of Agenda 21 and thought that a more significant mobilization of resources was called for. The financing of the struggle against drought and desertification should be included among the priority areas of the Global Environment Facility. Mali also greatly appreciated the activities of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office in combating drought and desertification, as well as the support the Office was receiving from UNDP and UNEP in the implementation of its plan of action. The international community would do well to strengthen its assistance to national and subregional institutions engaged in combating drought and desertification. Lastly, an international convention to combat desertification, particularly in Africa, would undoubtedly provide a suitable legal framework for the struggle against that scourge.

4. Ms. DOWSETT (New Zealand) applauded the commitment of United Nations bodies to dealing with the global problem of climate change. Through a number of important resolutions (43/53, 44/206 and 44/207), the General Assembly had enjoined the international community to take emergency action. Through its historic resolution on the protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind (45/212) it had established an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to prepare a framework convention on climate change and, after prolonged and arduous negotiations, that Convention had been adopted and opened for signature at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992.

5. Aware of the potentially disastrous effects of climate change, her country had actively participated in the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the Convention and had signed that instrument at Rio, recognizing that it established a basis for future action. For its part, New Zealand, had already adopted a policy aimed at reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and had begun work on further measures aimed at meeting the objectives of the Convention. It hoped to be able to ratify the Convention within the next two years, and was pleased to learn that it had been ratified by Zimbabwe.

6. Since further preparatory work was required in a number of fields before the first Conference of the Parties, it was essential that the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee should be accorded the resources it needed, as the Secretary-General pointed out in his report (A/47/466). In that connection, her delegation supported the Secretary-General's suggestion that the General Assembly should authorize the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to meet as needed, in 1993 and 1994 to carry out the plan of work in preparation for the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. In addition, it was desirable that the General Assembly should adopt a resolution empowering the Committee and its secretariat to make solid progress on climate change matters in 1993.

7. New Zealand also welcomed the decision taken at Rio to prepare a convention on combating desertification and drought, in view of the scope and gravity of the problems raised by those scourges.

8. Mr. WANG Xiadong (China) said that dealing with climate change and combating its adverse effects was an extremely important task incumbent upon the international community as a whole. His Government welcomed the fact that, after nearly two years of work, the International Negotiating Committee had definitively adopted the text of the Convention which had been opened for signature at Rio de Janeiro on 4 June 1992 on the occasion of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The Convention had already been signed by some 150 countries, which had thus assumed obligations of a binding nature. That demonstrated the international community's awareness of the urgency of the problem.

9. The Convention represented a first step in the right direction. It should be pointed out that the action envisaged with a view to attenuating the

(Mr. Wang Xiadong, China)

adverse effects of climate change was to be in accordance with the common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities of the parties. It was to be hoped that the parties, and especially the developed countries, would fulfil their obligations by limiting their emissions of greenhouse gases and by furnishing sufficient financial and technical resources to enable the developing countries, too, to play their part. Furthermore, it was essential that all necessary preparations should be completed before the holding of the first session of the Conference of the Parties.

10. As a developing country, China had to ensure the growth of its economy and the well-being of its population as well as to protect the environment, a double task which it was ready to discharge to the best of its ability. It had signed the Convention at Rio and the ratification process was under way. Moreover, China had adopted a ten-point strategy aimed at reconciling environmental protection with development, more particularly by restricting emissions of greenhouse gases and combating deforestation, and would endeavour to achieve the objectives of the Convention.

11. Mr. JACOVIDES (Cyprus) said that ever-growing consumption had inflicted such abuse on the environment and ecosystems that nature seemed to be losing the battle to man's productive powers. It was to be hoped that the Rio Conference on Environment and Development and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, opened for signature at Rio, testified to the development of an awareness in that field. The Convention, which marked the completion of a long and arduous process of negotiation initiated in 1988, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 43/53, was a significant contribution to the development of international law in the field of sustainable development.

12. Cyprus, itself a small island developing State, had made its modest contribution to the process through the Alliance of Small Island States, a group of developing countries which were particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of climate change and which, during the negotiations, had underlined the importance of preventive measures, particularly in respect of greenhouse gases. The interest generated by the Convention among the countries of the Alliance was hardly surprising, as they were particularly threatened by climate change and certain low-lying island States stood to disappear if the sealevel rose.

13. It was generally accepted that the Convention opened for signature at Rio was a compromise which, although not fully satisfactory, was nevertheless the first major step in the right direction. The special vulnerability of small island States and low-lying coastal areas was clearly recognized. However, the task at hand, regardless of the quality of the texts adopted, was to work together for the earliest possible entry into force of the Convention and for the conclusion of the necessary additional protocols. For that reason, the sixth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, due to be held at Geneva from 7 to 10 December 1992, was of paramount importance for the

(Mr. Jacovides, Cyprus)

practical implementation of the Convention. All Member States of the Organization, whatever their size and financial resources, should be able to take part, and it would be preferable for the session to be held in New York. It was no longer a time for words but for deeds and the international community should assume without delay its obligations towards present and future generations.

14. Mr. BARAC (Romania) attached particular importance to the protection of the global climate, which would require efforts on the part of all States. The negotiation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its signature by 156 States and the European Community was the starting-point for a long-term process; the road was open for joint action by all States and for the systematic study of global climatic phenomena. That study, in conjunction with the development of new technologies that would permit greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced, would further mankind's scientific knowledge. It had also become possible henceforth to give up traditional models of development which were harmful to the climate. The efforts deployed under the auspices of the United Nations had played a major role and Romania commended the action carried out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as well as by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). From the very beginning Romania had supported the idea of having the United Nations involved in the protection of the global climate and had participated in the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee. Moreover, at the national level, it had set up a group of experts to study carbon dioxide emissions in 1990-1991 together with the economic and social implication of a reduction of those emissions and the consequences of the greenhouse effect on Romania's natural ecosystems. The work of the group of experts had shown that carbon dioxide emissions had constantly fallen over the previous two years as a result of the sharp decline in industrial output.

15. Furthermore, Romania noted with satisfaction that WMO provided financial support for the participation of experts from developing countries in the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

16. In 1992, with support from a British consultancy firm, Romanian experts had evaluated greenhouse gas emissions, thanks to the financial assistance of the British Government. That cooperation demonstrated that solving the global problem of climate change needed joint efforts by all States.

17. Romania was determined to fulfil the commitments it had assumed when it signed the Framework Convention and actively to participate in all stages of the process which had begun. Moreover, the Conference of the Parties could guarantee the effectiveness of that legal instrument.

18. Mr. STOVALL (Micronesia) fully agreed with the calls by many speakers for immediate implementation of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and subscribed on the whole to the practical recommendations voiced in that regard. It was necessary to show due regard for the difficulties encountered by small developing countries which sought to participate in an enterprise of that magnitude. Micronesia, together with other small island developing countries, was gratified that the Convention included a number of provisions concerning the rise in the sealevel. However, it was unfortunate that the threat represented by the rise in the sealevel, which was a very gradual phenomenon that occurred at varying rates, was not yet taken very seriously. However, recent research indicated that there was a risk of a meltdown of the polar ice-caps at temperatures closer to current temperatures than had been thought. The sealevel could rise more rapidly than had been assumed at the Rio Conference. Accordingly, in that field the precautionary principle should guide all the parties to the Framework Convention, which was but a starting-point in dealing with the various threats arising from the climate changes caused by man. Its effectiveness would depend on the manner and speed of its implementation, as well as on the measures adopted by the parties to give life to the principles it contained. Micronesia would spare no effort to ensure the success of the Convention.

19. Lastly, Micronesia supported the call for the creation of an intergovernmental negotiating committee devoted to combating desertification and drought. It had become obvious, in the course of the negotiations on climate change, that the monumental problems already being experienced could not be adequately addressed within the existing Committee. Accordingly, it was necessary rapidly to decide on the establishment of a new intergovernmental negotiating committee, which should receive the priority due to the problem.

20. Mr. JALLOW (Gambia) emphasized that one of the major achievements of the Rio Conference was the recognition of drought and desertification as a global multidimensional and multisectoral problem which had serious socio-economic impacts in developing countries, particularly those in Africa. That marked a critical watershed since the United Nations Conference on Desertification of 1977, while the decision to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee for elaborating a convention to combat desertification had been one of the main decisions taken in Rio.

21. In the long term, that convention should combat desertification effectively with a view to alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development. It should also provide a framework for greater coordination and harmonization of international cooperation on the matter and help to promote the full integration of environmental protection and natural resource management in the development process. It should recognize the full participation of local communities in the decision-making process, as well as their rights over the resources they controlled.

(Mr. Jallow, Gambia)

22. He hoped that the convention would contribute towards strengthening national, subregional and regional capacities through public awareness campaigns, training, income generation incentives and the eradication of poverty as an indispensible prerequisite for sustainable development, as well as through the establishment of an open international economic system leading to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries.

23. Implementation of the provisions on drought and desertification, as contained in chapter 12 of agenda 21, would undoubtedly require additional resources. The international community should encourage efforts in that direction and include drought and desertification as a fifth autonomous issue for funding from the Global Environment Facility.

24. Gambia hoped that the General Assembly would establish an ad hoc secretariat that would draw on the experiences of the competent United Nations agencies and relevant regional organizations, as the problem of desertification should be approached from both environmental and developmental perspectives. The intergovernmental negotiating committee should also have a strong scientific base. Gambia proposed that the General Assembly should consider establishing an intergovernmental panel of experts to provide the necessary technical and scientific support.

25. Mrs. HASSAN (Egypt) stressed that Egypt fully supported the entry into force of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was particularly important to Egypt as a country vulnerable to climate change and its consequences (whether rises in water levels, floods or desertification). It had signed the Framework Convention during the Rio Conference and the ratification procedure was under way. Egypt was preparing a plan to evaluate the environmental effects of climate change and response policies. It proposed to establish a national committee to study environmental effects and evaluate the national situation concerning the emission of greenhouse gases. It also proposed to establish a set of coordination and cooperation frameworks with concerned international organizations and institutions, and welcomed all forms of bilateral or regional cooperation in environmental areas.

26. Despite the reservations it had prompted, the Framework Convention on Climate Change constituted a first step in the process of addressing serious threats to the planet. The true importance of the Convention lay in that it would give rise to concrete actions and be quickly followed by protocols making it fully effective and providing the finance needed for implementation, including appropriate reform of the Global Environment Facility.

27. The General Assembly should continue to support the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee so as to enable it to continue its preparatory work for the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties, particularly on defining appropriate methodologies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Finally, the Egyptian delegation fully supported the establishment of an international negotiating committee for preparing an international convention to combat desertification.

28. Mr. HURST (Antigua and Barbuda), speaking on behalf of the 12 States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and States Members of the United Nations, congratulated the Chairman and the Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, who had facilitated the lengthy negotiations culminating in the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The 12 CARICOM States had signed the Framework Convention and were in the process of ratifying it, even though, in their view, it had produced agreements rather than commitments. As small-island developing countries and low-lying coastal States, they were particularly vulnerable to the devastating effects of global warming - rising sealevels, more frequent and severe hurricanes and the possible inundation of thousands of square kilometres - which would result in the loss of arable lands and severe economic and social disruptions.

29. It was therefore important that countries should honour their commitments to take action to reduce climatic change and that the developed countries should honour their voluntarily undertaken obligations, to assist other States, particularly small developing countries and low-lying coastal States, in reducing their carbon dioxide emissions. Even if greenhouse gas emissions grew in the CARICOM States, it was unlikely that they would ever contribute more than miniscule amounts to their atmosphere build-up. The developed countries would therefore have to take the lead. Against that backdrop, CARICOM supported early ratification of the Framework Convention on Climate Change by all members of the international community and the opening of future negotiating rounds for a protocol to the Convention aimed at stabilizing and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2000.

30. The developing countries had accepted the obligation under the Convention to prepare national inventories of all anthropogenic sources of greenhouse gas emissions which were not covered by the Montreal Convention. The countries of the Caribbean Community did not have the necessary scientific and technological expertise and would therefore need assistance from the developed countries in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. They therefore attached particular importance to the commitments entered into by the developed countries with respect to transfer of expertise.

31. A key requirement for the successful implementation of the Convention was the availability of additional financial resources to meet the incremental costs of the provisions of the Convention. It was therefore important for the developed countries to honour their commitments in that respect. The countries of the Caribbean Community had accepted the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as the interim financing mechanism, provided that it was restructured in accordance with the principles of democracy, transparency and universality.

32. They had been active participants in the negotiations through their membership of the Alliance of Small Island States and had been among the first signatories of the Convention in Rio. They had thus demonstrated their strong commitment to the implementation of the Convention but at the same time they feared that their participation in future negotiations might be jeopardized if

(Mr. Hurst, Antigua and Barbuda)

INC did not continue to provide them with financial assistance to enable their representatives to attend. Furthermore, it would create great difficulties for the countries of the Caribbean Community and for other States with limited resources if the INC permanent secretariat was established in a location other than New York. They were thus all the more appreciative of the contributions paid by the developed countries pursuant to General Assembly resolution 45/212.

33. It was now the responsibility of the States members of the international community to implement the provisions of the Convention and ensure its early entry into force with a view to stabilizing emissions of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, into the atmosphere. Concrete steps must be taken to ensure that the implementation of the Convention attained the desired results.

34. As front-line countries directly in the path of climate change and its adverse consequences, the States of the Caribbean Community sincerely hoped that the momentum created by the negotiations on the Convention would induce States to take immediate and decisive action in the important phase of implementation.

35. Mr. VAN LIEROP (Vanuatu), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Alliance of Small Island States, paid a tribute to the Chairman of INC and to its Executive Secretary and fully endorsed the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77. Vanuatu was one of the countries most vulnerable to the adverse effects of human-induced climate change and it was grateful to the other developing countries for their solidarity and support and to the developed countries for helping to ensure that a convention on the subject would be open for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio. However, the work was not yet done; recent scientific evidence suggested that the dangers of global warming and its consequences - sealevel rise, and increased frequency and intensity of tropical storms - had been seriously underestimated. During the INC negotiations and in Rio the political will to address the problem had emerged but not necessarily in sufficient strength to complete the task. Given the enormity of the problem of drought and desertification, time was short. An effective intergovernmental committee must be set up to negotiate a convention on drought and desertification, and it was to be hoped that the results achieved would ease the plight of the countries most affected by the problem. Ironically, some countries threatened by sealevel rise were also threatened by drought and desertification. It was remarkable that the Framework Convention had been negotiated so rapidly, even if certain important elements, relating primarily to commitments by the developed countries, still required clarification. The Convention was none the less an important starting point. Furthermore, a number of developed countries had already committed themselves to measures to give more weight to the Convention and some had already taken action to stabilize - and reduce - their carbon dioxide emissions.

36. While it was for the developed countries to take the lead in that important area and provide the necessary financial resources for the

(Mr. Van Lierop, Vanuatu)

Convention to address the threat of global warming effectively, there were also major tasks for the other countries. Mauritius had been the first country to ratify the Convention, followed by other States of the Alliance of Small Island States and by other developing and developed countries. In order to facilitate the process it was essential for INC to continue to function until the Convention entered into force. The interim secretariat should continue to be provided with the resources needed to prepare the first conference of the parties. Vanuatu would support a resolution to that end.

37. All countries had shown understanding and a spirit of compromise in the negotiation of the Convention and there was no doubt that in the years to come the international community would have occasion to draw inspiration from that negotiation in other undertakings.

Draft decision A/C.2/47/L.13

38. The CHAIRMAN introduced the draft decision entitled "Large-scale pelagic drift-net fishing and its impact on the living marine resources of the world's oceans and seas" (A/C.2/47/L.13) and noted that, as the Committee had decided on the previous day to place brackets around all the provisions of resolutions relating to future reports until after consideration of the complementarity of agenda items between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, the end of the sentence from the words "to submit" should be bracketed.

The draft resolution, as amended, was adopted.

AGENDA ITEM 87: SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (continued)

(b) SPECIAL PROGRAMMES OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

Draft resolution A/C.2/47/L.18

39. Mr. AMMARIN (Jordan) introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors and said that the United Arab Emirates and Honduras had become sponsors. For 20 years Lebanon had been the victim of a destructive civil war, 20 per cent of the population had been displaced, education was paralysed and the currency eroded, making the economic situation of individuals even more difficult.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.